

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 CCO-00 NSCE-00 DODE-00 CIAE-00

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Z 271047Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC FLASH 0299

S E C R E T TEL AVIV 8673

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS EG IS

SUBJ: EGYPTIAN THIRD ARMY

REF: A. CAIRO 3245, 3248, 3249

B. DAO TEL AVIV 1992 DTG 270106Z OCT 73

C. GENEVA 5682

1. AS I SEE IT, FATE OF THIRD ARMY APPEARS CENTRAL TO OUR HOPES OF CREATION OF STABLE CEASEFIRE IN SOUTH WHICH IN TURN SYMS BASIC TO AVOIDING FURTHER SERIOUS STRAINS ON US-SOVIET RELATIONS, WHICH, WITH RELEVANT SECURITY COUNCIL INPUTS, IT BASIS FOR ANY HOPES FOR MOVING PARTIES TO PEACE NEGOTIATIONS.

2. ISRAELIS DO NOT HIDE FACT THAT FINAL LIND IN SIEGE CHAIN AROUND THIRD ARMY WAS FORGED BETWEEN FIRST AND SECOND CEASEFIRES (FITTING FINAL SUPPLY ROAD ON WEST BANK AND ISOLATING SUEZ CITY). THEY MAINTAIN, OF COURSE, THAT EGYPTIANS WERE (AND ARE) RESPONSIBLE FOR TAKING INITIATIVE FOR FIRST (AND OTHER) VIOLATIONS OF CEASEFIRES(S) AND IDF REACTED IN TIMELY MANNER TO TAKE PRIME OBJECTIVES. SINCE PURPOSE OF THIS MESSAGE IS NOT TO TRY TO DETERMINE WHO SHOT FIRST, I WILL LEAVE THIS PARTICULAR SUBJECT, AS IT NOT GERMANE TO MAIN THRUST OF THIS MESSAGE.

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3. THERE IS UNDOUBTEDLY CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE ON GOI FROM MILITARY COMANDERS IN SOUTHERN SUEZ FRONT TO GIVE AUTHORITY TO IDF TO FORCE SURRENDER TO THRID ARMY ELEMENTS TRAPPED

ON EAST BANK, ESTIMATED AT
UP TO 30-35,000 MEN. PREFERRED OPTION OF IDF, AS
DEP PRIME MIN ALLON INTIMATED TO ME ON OCT 24, HAD
BEEN TO "FINISH OFF" ALL EGYPTIAN ARMY ON SUEZ FRONT,
A MOVE WHICH HE RECOGNIZED WAS TEMPTING MILITARILY
BUT UNWISE POLITICALLY FROM INTERNATIONAL POINT OF VIEW.
THIS OPTION, HE NOTED, HAD BEEN EXPLICITLY REJECTED
BY GOI WHEN IT ACCEPTED SC RES. 338. AND CEASEFIRE.
IF, HOWEVER, EGYPTIAN SECOND ARMY INDEED JOINS FRAY
TO EXTRICATE TRAPPED THIRD ARMY--AS IDF APPARENTLY
BELIEVES IS LIKELIHOOD--THEN THE EGYPTIAN ARMED FORCES AND
CEASEFIRE WILL GO UP IN SMOKE, WITH UNPREDICTABLE WIDER
IMPLICATIONS.

4. WE DO NOT KNOW HERE IF GOI HAS ORDERED IDF QUIETLY
TO SQUEEZE THIRD ARMY INTO SURRENDER (ALLON A FEW
DAYS AGO SUGGESTED WITH TRAP SHU, POL AND WATER LINES
CUT, EGYPTIANS COULD ONLY LAST UP TO WEEK WITHOUT GIVING
UP.), OR IF ORDERS HAVE BEEN ISSUED TO ALLOW ENOUGH
ESSENTIAL, HUMANITARIAN HELP THROUGH TO KEEP THIRD ARMY
ALIVE, BUT HELPLESS. WIDELY PUBLICIZED (BY GOI) DISPATCH
OF 200 UNITS OF PLASMA FROM ISRAEL TO THIRD ARMY THROUGH
RED CROSS CHANNELS, AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE DAYAN'S

RECENT REMARKS (TEL AVIV 8654) AS POLITICAL RESTRAINTS
ON IDF MILITARY GOALS OF "DESTRUCTION OF ARAB ARMIES
AND THEIR WEAPONS," ARE SUGGESTIONS THAT GOI IS AT LEAST
CONSIDERING NOT FORCING SURRENDER OF THIRD ARMY, IF
INDEED DECISION TO THAT EFFECT NOT ALREADY TAKEN.

5. AS I SEE IT, PERSONNEL OF THIRD ARMY, WHETHER
ACTUALLY CAPTURED OR TRAPPED, ARE MOST IMPORTANT CHIPS
FOR GOI IN ATTEMPT FORCE EGYPTIANS TO AGREE TO RAPID
EXCHANGE OF POWS, A MOST SIGNIFICANT DOMESTIC POLITICAL
ISSUE HERE. I GATHER EGYPTIANS ARE STILL DRAGGING THEIR
FEET, PROBABLY ON ASSUMPTION ISRAELI POWS WILL FETCH
QUITE A PRICE IN CONCESSIONS FROM THE GOI.

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6. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, I RECOMMEND WE MOVE FAST
ON A NUMBER OF FRONTS, IF WE HAVE NOT ALREADY DONE SO,
TO AVOID WHAT APPEARS TO BE WORST CASE SHORT TERM
MILITARY POSSIBILITY IN SOUTH--ENGAGEMENT OF IDF AND
EGYPTIAN ARMIES ALL ALONG SUEZ FRONT:

A. GET SOVIETS TO INDUCE EGYPTIANS TO AGREE TO EARLY EXCHANGE
OF POWS. (THIS IS CRUCIAL.)

B. GET GOI TO AGREE NOT TO FORCE SURRENDER OF THIRD ARMY.

C. GET SOVIET AND EGYPTIANS TO FORCE COMMANDERS
OF THIRD AND SECOND ARMIES TO STOP SHOOTING, OR NOT TO

START SHOOTING. REASSURANCE THAT GOI NOT TRYING TO OBTAIN
SURRENDER OF THIRD ARMY IS KEY TO SUCCESS HERE.

7. SINCE THINGS APPEAR TO HAVE THEIR OWN MOMENTUM OUT
HERE WITH SUCH POTENTIALLY DIRE CONSEQUENCES, IT IS OBVIOUS
ALL OF THE ABOVE SHOULD BE ACCOMPLISHED IN MATTER OF HOURS,
NOT DAYS. I WOULD APPRECIATE QUICK RESPONSE TO ABOVE.
IF I'M WRONG OR IF THINGS ARE ALREADY IN HAND, I WOULD APPRECIATE
KNOWING. IF I'M RIGHT AND THINGS ARE NOT IN HAND AND WE
NEED TO MOVE FAST, PLEASE LET ME KNOW WHAT I CAN DO. IN THIS
RESPECT, I HAVE APPOINTMENT AT 1700 LOCAL (1500Z) WITH
FONMIN EBAN.
KEATING

SECRET

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